

THE IMPERATIVAL *ἵνα*

Dr. Morrice, recently appointed New Testament lecturer at New College, London, has been on the staff of the British and Foreign Bible Society as New Testament adviser.

The main use of this conjunction in both classical and New Testament Greek is to express purpose along with a verb in the subjunctive mood. However, by the third century B.C., a new construction—the imperatival use of *ἵνα*—was emerging, which cannot be translated by a purpose clause in English. Two examples are found in third century B.C. Greek papyri. By the first century A.D., the construction was well established and it survives in modern Greek as one of the ways of expressing a command.¹

Most modern English translations recognise this imperatival *ἵνα* in several passages. However, they are not agreed as to which passages should be so regarded. It could be argued that, in certain instances, an inadequate and sometimes misleading translation is given and that this affects the theological interpretation. It is, therefore, important for translators into other languages to be made aware of these passages and of alternative ways of rendering them.

Synoptic Gospels

There are five possible examples of the imperatival *ἵνα* in the Synoptics.

(1) **Matthew 20:33** The first one we encounter in the New Testament is an interesting example since it helps to explain how this construction developed.² In the previous verse, Jesus asks the blind men, "What do you want me to do for you?" They reply, "Sir, let our eyes be opened." (So Translators' Translation,* cf. Revised Standard Version). New English Bible and Today's English Version both translate as if the verb is repeated from the previous verse and is followed by the *ἵνα* clause.³ "Sir, we want our sight." (NEB). "Sir, we want you to open our eyes!" (TEV). Authorised Version and Revised Version translate word for word: "Lord, that our eyes may be opened."

(2) **Mark 5:23** In Mark's account of the healing of Jairus' daughter, we are told that Jairus pleaded with Jesus: "My little daughter is almost dying. Come and lay your hands upon her that her life may be saved and that she

¹ See Liddell and Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, new edition 1925, vol. I, p. 830; C. J. Cadoux, *Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. XLII, no. 167-8 (July-Oct. 1941), p. 166f; J. H. Moulton, *Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. I, p. 176: *ἵνα εἴπῃς* = MGk *να̅ πῆς*, say! C. F. D. Moule, *Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, p. 144f; Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 379, recognise eight of the instances discussed in this article and add another possible example: 1 Cor. 16:16.

² Cf. C. J. Cadoux, *op. cit.*, p. 165: "At first the *ἵνα*-clause, in conformity with the normal character of the conjunction, was a dependant noun-clause following some main verb like *θέλω*. But while this subordinating construction remained in use, the custom grew up of dropping the main verb, so that the *ἵνα*-clause virtually became as much a main sentence as if the plain imperative had been used."

* The Translators' Translation presently being produced by the British and Foreign Bible Society primarily for the use of translators.

³ *θέλωμεν ἵνα* . . . Cf. Matthew 7:12—*πάντα οὖν ὅσα ἐὰν θέλητε ἵνα ποιῶσιν ὑμῖν οἱ ἄνθρωποι.*

may live." (Mark 5:23) The phrase: "Come and lay your hands", represents an aorist participle ("having come") wedged between the conjunction and an aorist subjunctive. This *iva* makes very good sense when treated as imperatival. In the parallel passage in Matt. 9:18, we actually find an aorist imperative instead of *iva* plus the subjunctive. Does this not mean that Matthew recognised the imperatival *iva* in Mark, but did not really approve of it?

Modern English versions vary in their treatment of Mark 5:23. RSV, Moffatt, TEV, TT, and Barclay all recognise the imperatival construction in this case. NEB needlessly inserts the words, "I beg you to . . ."

There is a second *iva* in Mark 5:23. In spite of what Dr. Turner says,⁴ I think that this is better taken in the purposive sense and translated, "so that her life may be saved . . ." There is no need to look for an imperatival *iva* in any instance where it can be translated in the more usual sense to indicate purpose.

(3) **Mark 10:51** A similar example to the first is found in Mark's account of blind Bartimaeus who said to Jesus: "Rabboni, let me see again." (TT.) RSV also recognises the imperatival *iva* here: "Master, let me receive my sight." (Cf. Phillips, Jerusalem Bible.)

(4) **Luke 18:41** St. Luke's version of the healing of Bartimaeus also includes this imperatival *iva*: "Sir, let me see again." (TT.)

(5) **Mark 14:49** The final example in the Synoptic Gospels is found within the context of the arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. After pointing out that he had not been arrested while teaching daily in the temple, Jesus declared: "But let the scriptures be fulfilled."⁵ (See NEB, RSV, TT.)

The Fourth Gospel

There are at least four examples of the imperatival *iva* here. As Dr. Turner has pointed out, "much of the apparent fatalism is taken from the fourth gospel by an understanding of the syntax of *iva*."⁶

(1) **John 9:3** In the story of the man who was born blind, the disciples asked Jesus: "Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" In his reply, Jesus indicated that this was a question that should never have been asked. It was neither the man's sin nor his parents' that had caused his blindness. The concern of the disciples should be to try and cure him. "Let God's power be displayed in curing him!" Jesus proceeded to do exactly that. "The hypothesis of the imperatival *iva*, therefore, releases the text from the fatalism which had obsessed it, and dissolves the picture which had become familiar through all our English versions, a man destined from birth to suffer for the sole purpose of glorifying God when he was healed."⁷

(2) **John 12:7** RSV, Moffatt, NEB, TEV, TT, and Barclay all recognise the imperatival *iva* here. When Judas Iscariot grumbled about the waste when

⁴ Nigel Turner, *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament*, p. 147: "The second *iva* could be a conjunction of purpose, but it is better to take it like the first: 'Let her be cured!'"

⁵ C. J. Cadoux, *op. cit.*, p. 168/9, note 4, points out that "this is the one case in the whole group in which the AV renders the *iva*-clause as a main sentence ('but the Scriptures must be fulfilled'). The RV never does so."

⁶ Nigel Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

Mary anointed the Master's feet, Jesus said: "Let her be! Let her keep it for the day of my burial."

(3) **John 13:18** The recognition of the imperatival *iva* in this passage avoids the theological difficulty of saying that Judas was excluded from the number of Christ's chosen ones *in order that* Scripture may be fulfilled. "It is not that Judas is excluded for a purpose, but that Judas has excluded himself."⁸ So we can translate as follows: "But let the Scripture be fulfilled which says . . ." J. B. Phillips and the Translators' Translation both recognise the imperatival *iva* here.

(4) **John 15:25** Here again, according to Dr. Turner, the "traditional interpretation would involve another piece of fatalism".⁹ The rejection of Jesus by the Jews was surely not planned by God "that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law" (AV). TEV carries the same implication: "This must be, however, so that what is written in their Law may come true." So does NEB: "However, this text in their Law had to come true." NEB margin, however, recognises the possible imperatival force of *iva* by translating: "Let this text in their Law come true." Surely this makes far better sense of the Greek text. "Jesus was simply provoked to a sad sigh of resignation, introduced by the imperatival *iva*, 'Let the Torah be fulfilled'."

The Pauline Epistles

There are several possible examples of the imperatival *iva* in Paul's Epistles.

(1) **1 Cor. 5:2** This is usually taken as a final clause, following the UBS Greek text. "Why have you not rather mourned, so that he who did this thing would be expelled from your midst?" (TT) However, only an imperatival *iva* really makes good sense here, as RSV recognises: "Let him who has done this be removed from among you." NEB and TEV almost come to this as well by using the English "should"; though they both seem reluctant to give the *iva* its full imperatival force.¹⁰

(2) **1 Cor. 7:29** The Translators' Translation recognises the imperatival *iva* here: "From now on let those who have wives be as if they had not." Compare also Moffatt and RSV.

(3) **2 Cor. 8:7** The *iva* could well be taken as introducing a plain imperative here.¹¹ The clause could then be translated something like this: "Be rich (or, abound) in this gracious service also." AV and RSV seem to feel that something more than the imperative is intended and add the words, "see that . . .". Compare TEV: "and so we want you to be generous also in the service of

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 148. I have not been able to trace Dr. Turner's final reference in this section to a later occasion when Jesus reminded the Temple officers that they had neglected to arrest him when he taught there daily. If this is a reference to John 18:9, I would think it simpler to take the *iva* here as purposive and to put the sentence within brackets, as do NEB and TEV. Cf. Mark 14:49 discussed above.

¹⁰ Cf. Nigel Turner in J. H. Moulton: *Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. III, p. 95.

¹¹ C. J. Cadoux, *op. cit.*, regards this, along with Mark 5:23; Eph. 5:33; Gal. 2:10, as being an unmistakable case of this imperatival use of *iva* with the subjunctive.

love." Compare also NEB: "Surely you should show yourselves equally lavish in this generous service!"

(4) **Gal. 2:10** This verse may contain another example, though I would not go so far as Dr. Cadoux in regarding this as being an unmistakable case.¹² If we regard this *iva* as imperatival, the translation would be something like this, "only let us remember the poor." Compare TT: "There was one condition only: we were to remember the poor." NEB puts this into indirect speech: "All they asked was that we should keep their poor in mind." (Cf. TEV.)

(5) **Eph. 5:33** In the first part of this verse, Paul uses a straightforward imperative: "Let each one of you love his wife as himself." Then he proceeds to exhort wives with the aid of the imperatival *iva*: "Let the wife respect her husband." AV, RV and RSV add "see that she", while NEB adds even more words: "and the woman must see to it that she pays her husband all respect." As Dr. Turner puts it, "such clumsy circumlocution is avoidable, for the evidence of Hellenistic syntax strongly supports the imperatival *iva*."¹³

(6) **Philem. 19** This could be taken as an example of the imperatival *iva* and could be translated as follows: "Let me not say to you that you owe me yourself as well." TT puts this into brackets and inserts introductory words to make the sense clear: "(I should not have to remind you, of course, that you owe your life to me.)" RSV has a neat rendering: "To say nothing of your owing me even your own self." How clumsy some of the other translations are here! ". . . that I say not unto thee how that . . ." (RV); "albeit I do not say to thee how . . ." (AV).

The Remainder of the New Testament

There are three or four possible examples of this construction in the remaining books of the New Testament.

(1) **Heb. 13:17** In this case, RSV, Moffatt, Phillips, Barclay, NEB and TT all translate this by some form of the imperative. For example, TT: "Make this a joy to them and not a burden." In the translational note TT says: "Literally, 'that they may do this with joy and not groaning'." If, however, this is a true imperatival *iva*, the literal translation would be: "Let them do this with joy and not groaning."

(2) **1 John 2:19** In the original intention of the author, this may have been written as an imperatival *iva* construction: "But let them be clearly made known that they are not all of our company." Since this does not flow smoothly in English, most versions take the *iva* as purposive and insert a few introductory words: "They went out that it might be made plain that none of them belonged to us." (TT: cf. AV, RV, RSV, Barclay, TEV).

(3) **Rev. 14:13** If this is another example of the imperatival *iva*,¹⁴ the

¹² See note 11. H. G. Meecham—*Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. XLIII, no. 171-2 (July-October 1942), p. 180—considers this to be a probable rather than a certain instance of the independent imperatival use. A. R. George—*Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. XLV, no. 177-8 (Jan.-April 1944), p. 56/7—questions the construction here.

¹³ Nigel Turner, *Grammatical Insights*, p. 147.

¹⁴ J. H. Moulton, *op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 248, says that the superior fitness of the imperatival *iva* here in the grammatical structure of the verse is undeniable.

translation would be: “‘Happy are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!’ ‘Indeed they are,’ says the Spirit. ‘Let them rest from their hard work; for the record of their deeds follows them.’” Most English versions ignore the presence of the *ἵνα* here. AV provides a literal rendering that does not make sense in English: “Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours . . .”

(4) **Rev. 22:14** This is another beatitude, this time on “those who wash their robes clean”. Then there comes a *ἵνα* with a future indicative of the verb “to be” followed by *καὶ* (= and) and a subjunctive. NEB renders both these verbs as future indicatives and ignores the presence of the *ἵνα*: “They will have the right to the tree of life and will enter by the gates of the city.” Would it not be simpler here also to regard the *ἵνα* as imperatival? Then we could translate as follows: “Let them have . . . and let them enter . . .” This would be a neater way of expressing the rewards granted to those who have washed their robes clean.¹⁵

Conclusion

Professor Moule introduces his section on the subject of the Imperatival *ἵνα* as follows: “An interesting extension of the *final ἵνα* is the well-known idiom whereby it becomes practically *imperative* in sense”.¹⁶ I feel that this idiom has not been well enough known or recognised to influence modern English versions of the New Testament. By the first century A.D., the imperatival *ἵνα* was so well established as idiomatic Greek that it could be used by New Testament writers on perhaps eighteen or nineteen occasions.

It is not always necessary to render these Greek phrases as imperatives into English or any other language. In fact, it may be clumsy to do so in certain instances. However, translators should be made aware of these passages so that, in whatever form they may decide to render the words, they may be careful not to distort the original meaning of the Greek text.

¹⁵ Nigel Turner, *Grammatical Insights*, p. 48, feels that in both Rev. 14:13 and 22:14 “the better known imperatival *ἵνα* would be even more suitable” than to adopt the suggestion of Dr. Meecham that the conjunction means here “because”. See Dr. Meecham’s review of C. F. D. Moule: *Idiom Book of New Testament Greek*, vol. I, no. 1, Sept. 1954, p. 64.

¹⁶ C. F. D. Moule, *op. cit.*, p. 144.